

GOP Plan Boots 100 Area Children From Program, Fires 25 Early Childhood Educators

Poughkeepsie, NY - After reading to area children at a local Head Start program in Poughkeepsie, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today spoke out against federal cuts to the early childhood education program that have been proposed by the Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. The \$1.1 billion dollar nationwide cut would slash the Dutchess County program by over \$1 million, booting at least 100 children out of local Head Start classrooms and laying off at least 25 educators. Head Start serves almost 700 pre-k children in seven locations throughout Dutchess County. Approximately 250 are served in Poughkeepsie, and the wait list for the program is extensive.

"Without Head Start, millions of children would enter kindergarten without basic educational and developmental skills needed to succeed," said Hinchey. "Right here in Poughkeepsie, there is a waiting list to get into the program. But instead of working to provide Head Start for all, Republicans in Washington have proposed kicking 100 kids right here in Dutchess County out of their classrooms and firing their teachers. That means one out of every seven children I read to today, may not have a classroom to come back to a few months from now. This is not the way to reduce the deficit. Education is one of the best investments we can make, because it enriches the lives of our children, allowing them to grow into being productive and successful citizens in our democracy."

Since its creation in 1965, Head Start programs have served over 27 million children. Statewide, the House Republican cuts would mean removing nearly 12,000 New York children from the Head Start program, while eliminating 3,500 jobs and terminating over 900 hundred classes. Nationally, a cut of \$1.1 billion would eliminate 218,000 kids from Head Start and would close 16,000 classrooms. While the program receives \$7.2 billion in annual funding, the proposed cuts would occur immediately. Instead of being spread over the course of a year, these cuts would be absorbed in a 6 month time frame, cutting the current operating budgets for Head Start programs approximately 25 percent.

"Head Start and Early Head Start is an important component in our range of services," said Astor's Executive Director Dr. James McGuirk. "It clearly has demonstrated on a regular basis that the children who have participated in these programs are better prepared when they enter kindergarten. Just as important, the parents acquire the skills necessary to story their kids success in school."

"Head Start works," said Mary Sontheimer, Assistant Executive Director of Early Childhood Programs at Astor. "We work with the neediest children and families in Dutchess County. We work together with the families to form self sustaining, productive neighbors through comprehensive services. The program collaborates with other community agencies in order to maximize use of funding and services to infants, toddlers and preschoolers. The work of the staff with thousands of children and families in Dutchess County cannot be overstated. The caring and commitment is evident in their day work as well as positive outcomes for the children and families served."

A parent of a child who completed the Head Start Program, Elizabeth Downs noted that, "what makes Head Start unique from other pre-schools and day cares is that intertwined throughout the educational activities are the two most important things every child needs to succeed – empathy and self-confidence."

Head Start is only one several education programs targeted by Republicans. Cuts to special education, teacher improvement programs and science and math education were also included in the Republican spending bill. Pell Grants, one of the most important programs to help students pay for college, and the TRIO program, another important program that provides support services to disadvantaged students, are also slated for cuts.

The cuts were initially proposed as part of a Republican spending bill, H.R. 1, designed to fund the government for the remainder of the fiscal year. Hinchey voted against the proposed legislation because of cuts to Head Start and other vital programs that economists say will slow economic growth, costing up to 1 million jobs. The bill ultimately passed in the U.S. House but was rejected by the Democratically controlled U.S. Senate. A temporary spending bill was passed to fund the federal government until March 18. To avoid a government shutdown, a new spending bill must be signed into law by this coming Friday. Cuts to Head Start will continue to be a point of contention as lawmakers work to negotiate a final package.